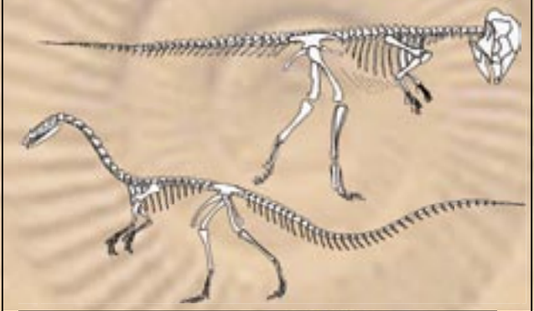
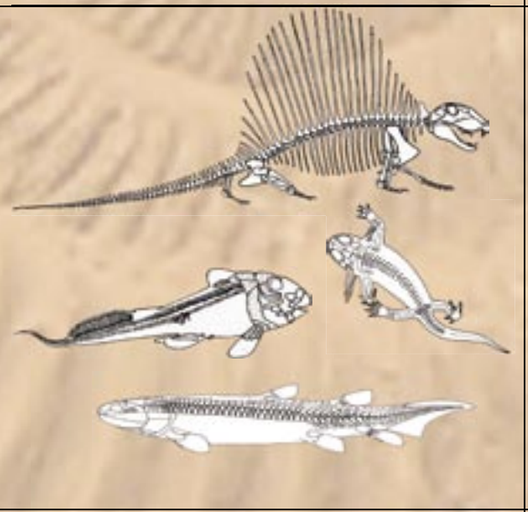
ERA	PERIOD	EPOCH	AGE (million yrs.)	VERTEBRATES (Collect with permit only)	INVERTEBRATES (Collect without permit)
CENOZOIC Age of Mammals	QUATERNARY	recent	.01		
		Pleistocene	2		
	NEOGENE	Pliocene	5		
		Miocene	24		
	PALEOGENE	Oligocene	37		
		Eocene	58		
		Paleocene	66		
MESOZOIC Age of Reptiles	CRETACEOUS		144		
	JURASSIC		208		
	TRIASSIC		245		
PALEOZOIC Age of Fishes	PERMIAN		286		
	PENNSYLVANIAN		330		
	MISSISSIPPIAN		360		
	DEVONIAN		408		
	SILURIAN		438		
	ORDOVICIAN		505		
	CAMBRIAN		570		
PRECAMBRIAN					

Graphics not to scale.

FOSSILS

On America's Public Lands

CLUES FROM THE PAST

BLM

NMMNH&S

New Mexico

Fossils on New Mexico's Public Lands

Public lands in New Mexico record a long history of life on earth, locked in the sedimentary rocks exposed at the earth's surface. From the badlands of the San Juan Basin, through the valley fill deposits and uplifted mountains of the basin and range, into the Permian Basin and onto the High Plains, evidence of ancient life can occur.

Fossils are the remains or traces of any organism preserved in rocks. Paleontology is the study of those fossils and the scientists who study fossils are known as paleontologists. Through careful collection and study of fossils, we learn the story of origins and endings, life, death, and change — played out over nearly 3.5 billion years of the Earth's 4.5 billion-year history.

The fossil record in New Mexico covers over 400 million years of geologic time and includes fossils ranging in size from microscopic ostrocods to the longest dinosaur ever recovered, Seismosaurus, with lots in between! Paleontologists and geologists use this great variety of life to tell geologic time, as well as to interpret environments and climate changes over earth's history. Just as today's plants and animals occupy certain life zones, past life forms lived in particular habitats. This helps scientists study, interpret, and understand Earth's past. Fossils from public lands represent a rich resource to appreciate, enjoy, and protect.

What Can I Collect?

You can collect a variety of fossils on public lands, unless otherwise prohibited. For example, Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas are closed to collecting of any kind.

Reasonable amounts of invertebrate fossils (animals without a backbone — for example, brachipods, oysters, gastropods) may be collected. You can also collect plant fossils, such as leaf impressions, small sticks, and twigs. A reasonable amount has been established to be a two-gallon bucketfull, per group. You can collect up to 25 pounds of petrified wood (plus one piece) per day and up to 250 pounds per year.

Any material you collect must be for your personnel use and cannot be bartered or sold. Remember to leave some for the next person.

No permit for these activities is required, but it's always a good idea to stop by the nearest BLM office to verify land ownership, and check for local information, such as road conditions, fire danger, or any special management areas where collecting is not allowed.

What's a Vertebrate?

Animals with backbones are vertebrates, such as fish, reptiles, mammals, and birds. Animal behavior can also be documented in tracks and trackways made by these animals. Because of their relative rarity and scientific importance, collecting vertebrate fossils on public land without a permit is prohibited. This includes tracks and trackways.

BLM issues permits to qualified scientists who want to conduct scientific investigations. The paleontologists at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science (NMMNH&S) in Albuquerque collect from public lands under this permit system.

The museum displays fossils from public land, ensuring that the people of New Mexico and visitors to our state will have access to these resources for many years to come. In the collections area of the museum, researchers from all over the world can study these fossils. You can visit the museum and the collections at www.nmfossils.org.

How Can I Help?

You can help BLM manage and protect these unique resources simply by reporting the location of any vertebrate fossils you find to the nearest BLM office. This way, land managers can alert professional paleontologists, ensuring that the bones are properly removed, studied, and preserved for everyone's benefit. Please do not attempt to remove them yourself, since important information may be lost, no matter how careful you might be. There are also serious penalties for unauthorized collection.

Remember, Paleontology is Not Archeology

Archeology is the science that studies the remains of past human activity. You may not collect artifacts associated with human activity. On rare occasions, fossil bones may be associated with human activity. Such a site would be very important and should be reported to your nearest BLM office.

Contact your nearest BLM office if you are interested in collecting invertebrate fossils.

Albuquerque District Office
435 Montaño Rd. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87107
505/761-8700

Carlsbad Field Office
620 E. Greene St.
Carlsbad, NM 88220
505/234-5980

Farmington District Office
1235 La Plata Highway
Farmington, NM 87401
505/599-8900

Las Cruces District Office
1800 Marquess St.
Las Cruces, NM 88005
505/525-4300

Pecos District Office
2909 W. 2nd St.
Roswell, NM 88201
505/627-0272

Socorro Field Office
198 Neel Ave. NW
Socorro, NM 87801
505/835-0412

Taos Field Office
226 Cruz Alta Rd.
Taos, NM 87571
505/758-8851

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
New Mexico State Office
1474 Rodeo Road
Santa Fe, NM 87505
505/438-7400 or www.nm.blm.gov

BLM/NM/GI-04-012-1050